

The Impact of COVID Recovery Funding on Babies, Young Children and their Families in Jersey

Introduction

On 30th March 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic meant that Jersey was in lockdown. This involved physical distancing and orders for people to Stay at Home.

The footsteps of children were no longer heard.

It was 42 days before there was a shift to a 'soft lockdown' when the Stay-at-Home order was lifted though social distancing measures remained in place. The impact of lockdown on expectant parents, babies, young children and their families was described in a briefing paper and a survey report produced by the Best Start Partnership¹².

While these captured invaluable insights into experiences during this unprecedented time, the longer-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic continued for many months and subsequent years impacting on babies, young children and their families and are still evident today.

In 2022, a new fund was supported through the Government Plan to ensure targeted and timely projects were able to address the wider health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund was governed under the leadership of a Political Oversight Group who championed health and Social Recovery activity across all Government of Jersey departments. The Council of Ministers understood that while COVID-19 had caused direct harm through infection and disease, the measures necessarily taken to control its spread themselves caused harm through disruption to people's lives and incomes.

These additional health and economic impacts of the pandemic magnified and accelerated pre-existing social and economic challenges, highlighting more clearly unequal impacts and inequality for certain groups. The Council of Ministers committed to a Health and Social Recovery allocation, with political oversight, to develop investment in a breadth of proposed projects to support Islanders' recovery.

The criteria set for the allocated monies was that investment proposals should be:



Briefing%20paper%20-%20Impact%20of%20COVID-19



Best%20Start%20survey%20report.docx

- Temporary, timely, and targeted
- Evidence-based investment
- Focused on prevention and potential for invest to save
- An immediate service need exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic impacts
- Impactful on improving Islanders' experience of their community and their Island
- Able to make long term improvements to Islanders' wellbeing or mental health

By 2022, Best Start partners identified that issues faced by babies and young children in Jersey were similar to those reported nationally i.e. delayed development through lack of social and play opportunities, an increase in communication, language and literacy difficulties on account of reduced interaction an increase in the number of children exhibiting special education needs. Parents unsure where to find information including early years and childcare. Partners also identified a need to ensure a sufficient and skilled early years workforce, to support children and parents with the challenges identified above.

This report documents the impact of the Covid Recovery Fund specifically relating to the activity undertaken by the Best Start Partnership. It uses measures relating to specific activity agreed as required by the Partnership. The following data has been established over the time frame that the Covid Recovery Fund was in place for 2022- 2023.

- The number of Reception children who are multilingual learners achieving or exceeding their level of development was between
- 90% of children demonstrated high levels of Well-being in 2023, this is an increase of 4% from 2022.
- 90% of children demonstrated high levels of Involvement this is an increase of 4% from 2022.
- 89% of children demonstrated all nine of the Characteristics of Effective Learning this is an increase of 22% from 2022.
- The data showed that the achievement of Multilingual learners had increased by 3% from 2022-2023.
- The gap between children in receipt of Jersey Premium and those not in receipt of Jersey Premium, who are meeting all ELG's has reduced from 22% to 21% this year. Their overall performance has increased by 7% since 2021.

- An increased percentage of children reaching developmental milestones at 2 years (80% in 2022 – 83% in 2023).
- An increased percentage of children achieving expected or above levels in Communication and Language (from 79% in 2022 to 83% in 2023)

Specific Activity

The next part of this report details the specific activities as agreed by the Best Start Partnership.



50 Things to Do Before You're Five

The 50 things to do before you're five app is a Best Start for all offer, launched in Jersey in 2022. 50 Things to Do is a place-based, parent facing offer. It helps parents to develop their home learning environment so that far more children thrive by the age of five. 50 Things to Do is designed to increase parental engagement with their child's development, by providing a positive home learning environment.

We purchased the 50 Things app, to positively influence children's health and wellbeing, based on the research that 'what parents do is more important than who they are'³.

How much we did

Number of downloads per year

2022 1,364

2023 569

2024 306

Number of roadshow events

2023 11

2024 12

How well we did it

Unique devices as a % of under 5 population

22 - 24 40.8%

Number of children attended events

2023 400

2024 306

Is anyone better off?

Quotes from parents/carers at roadshow events

"I am over 50 and use it for my grandchild, funds are low, and my mobility is limiting a lot of what I can do and provide for him. This is amazing, as it takes away the thinking pressure for ideas"
Grandparent

"We love the app - it gives me ideas and my little girl has enjoyed all the activities we have done so far"
Parent

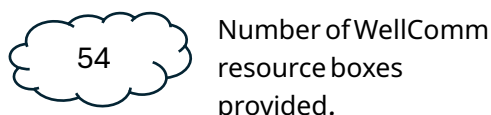
"I can see when he is doing the activities that he is taking it all in. With the bubbles and water, he looks at them so closely and he smiles"
Parent

³ Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3 - 14 Project (EPPSE 3 - 14) - Final Report from the Key Stage 3 Phase: Influences on Students' Development from age 11-1*. London: DfE.

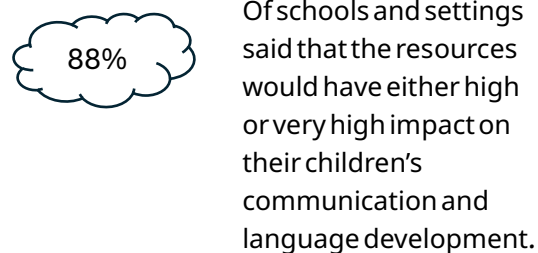
WellComm Resource Packs

WellComm is a Speech and Language Toolkit for Screening and Intervention in the Early Years: Revised Edition that plays a crucial role in identifying children with potential language difficulties and offers a range of customised intervention activities to help support their language development. As well as being an evidence-based programme, a pilot project launched by Every Child Our Future highlighted that 'WellComm is an effective tool for early years assessment and action'. In order to carry out effective Time to Talk groups, schools and settings need access to resources to enable them to carry out each intervention activity. We worked with Speech and Language Therapists to identify what a school or setting would need to do this. This included the WellComm toolkit, and the resources needed in order to carry out effective Time to Talk groups and activities within the setting. Significant investment has also gone into training all schools and settings in using WellComm.

How much we did

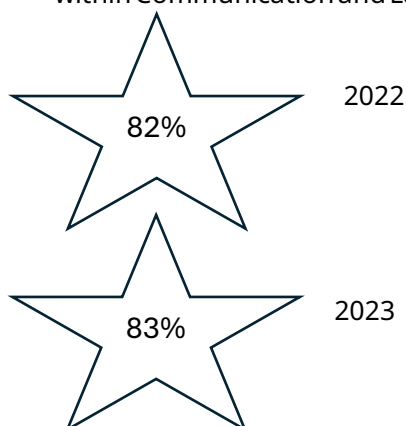


How well we did it

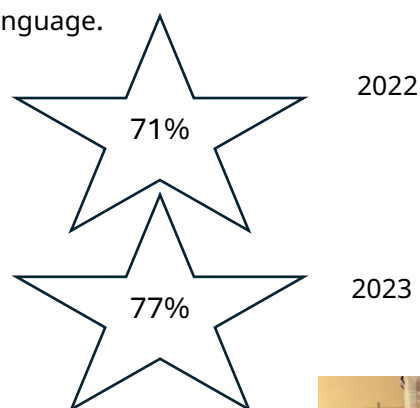


Is anyone better off?

% of children meeting their Early Learning Goal within Communication and Language.



% of children at age related expectations on entry to Reception within Communication and Language.



"WellComm pack has enabled us to engage and support the children in our setting with their language and understanding and developing their skills"
Practitioner



Communication, Language and Literacy Resources

Through meetings with early years practitioners and quality development officers, as well as utilising research^{4 5} we identified resources^{6 7} such as high-quality children's books, small world and open-ended play resources, to support the development of communication, language and literacy, alongside ongoing continuous professional development opportunities.

How much we did

54

Number of Communication and Language resource boxes provided.

4050

High quality books provided across early years settings and 20 public spaces, such as Jersey Hospital and the Employment, Social Security and Housing office.

How well we did it

88%

Of schools and settings said that the resources would have either high or very high impact on their children's communication and language development.

Is anyone better off?

"Having access to a greater variety of resources will be hugely beneficial" Practitioner

"They will greatly develop listening, understanding and speaking skills" Practitioner

"Resources such as these have a great positive impact of the development of communication and language" Practitioner

"To have been given these really high-quality resources is such a wonderful gift for our early years children. It is not often that we have the budget to buy these high-quality resources that are so needed to promote high levels of engagement and involvement which supports child development and progress for every child" Practitioner



⁴ <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/scealta-blog/choosing-books/>

⁵ <https://clpe.org.uk/research/choosing-and-using-quality-childrens-texts-what-we-know-works>

⁶ <https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/areas-of-learning/communication-and-language/exploring-language>

⁷ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years/evidence-store/communication-and-language>



"The parent commented how popular the lending library is and at the end of the day there are usually 5-6 children all together around it choosing their books to take home and share with their parents" Parent via a practitioner



Move More Toddler Play

Move More Toddler Play is an initiative run by Jersey Sport. They offer free to parents/carers active play opportunities for babies and toddlers. Move More Toddler Play sessions take place at a variety of locations across the island and at each session, experienced Move More practitioners are at each session to lead and encourage families to play in a fun, engaging way, creating an enjoyable and positive learning environment for everyone.

Best Start supported Jersey Sport to expand their Move More Toddler Play timetable. The objective was for Jersey Sport to launch this with three afternoons a week. These sessions required an additional 9 hours of staffing for two members of staff.

How much we did



Number of additional sessions.

How well we did it



Number of children attended.

Is anyone better off?

"We live in a flat so can't provide this at home! Great for both of us, supports my mental health as I am able to come to these sessions to fill the void of what I cannot provide at home" Parent

"Both me and my son have made lots of friends in this group, my boy now speaks and understands more, good change of places that we enjoy with nature and different children" Parent

"This was a god send for when I was on maternity leave and still is now! If struggling with things to do or feeling isolated as a mother, me and my son always have a brilliant time and leave with our cups full after lots of friendly interaction with other children, mums and the lovely leaders!" Parent

"We live in a flat so can't provide this at home! Great for both of us, supports my mental health as I am able to come to these sessions to fill the void of what I cannot provide at home"



Development of a Best Start Website: beststart.je

The aim of developing the Best Start website, beststart.je, was to provide parents, carers and the early years workforce with one central location to access reliable and trusted sources of information. In order not to duplicate work that was already happening, it was decided to link out, wherever the information already existed.

How much we did



11

Pop up events to gather information from parents.



1

EYFS lead practitioners meeting to gather information from schools and settings.

How well we did it



15,275

Total page views



4,343

Total sessions

Is anyone better off?

"It is so handy to have a search bar - it makes it much easier to find what you are looking for"

Parent of a 17-month-old

"It's hard to find information when you are looking through loads of different websites - I mostly just ask my friends with children but the [Best Start] website means it's in one place" Parent

"I was looking for a document the other day and couldn't find it but when I went to your [Best Start] website, I could find it straight away" Practitioner



NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award for Special Educational Needs Coordinators in Early Years

Settings

This course explores the roles and responsibilities of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator in an early years setting. The overall aim of funding this training was to enable every early years setting to have a qualified SENCO. This course supports practitioners to understand the strategies and techniques for supporting children and their families and to increase knowledge of SEN codes of practice.

How much we did



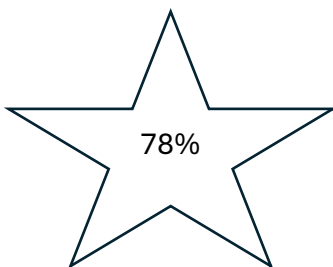
Hours of guided learning time.

How well we did it

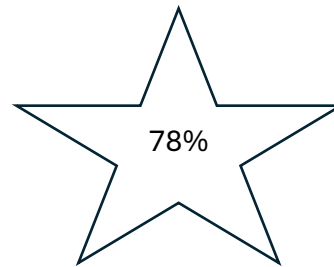


SENCOs trained in registered settings.

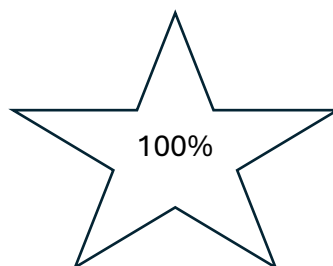
Is anyone better off?



Of lead SENCOs reported that they felt more confident in identifying children with additional needs.



Of lead SENCOs reported that that their confidence in supporting a child's additional needs through the assess, plan, do review process had increased.



Of lead SENCOs reported that they had increased their knowledge of policy and legislation.

Early Childhood Education and Care Survey

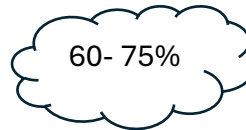
The aim of the survey was to be able to produce a report to provide information on childcare and early years provision in Jersey. This was the first time a survey of this nature had been administered in Jersey and results reflect a 'baseline' for the island. Specifically, the survey set out to provide important insight into the current capacity of the childcare and early years sector to educate and care for Jersey's children. In addition, the report was to provide a picture of the workforce and identify the key challenges facing the childcare sector over the short to medium term.

How much we did



5 Surveys developed and sent out.

How well we did it



60-75% Response rate for each provider type.

Is anyone better off?

Informed Early Years Roundtable event and report: Messages for policy makers in Jersey.



NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate for the Children and Young People's Workforce

This qualification is designed to help learners build the knowledge and skills needed when working under supervision with children and young people from birth to 19 years of age. It covers a diverse range of job roles and occupational areas working in children's settings including early years and social care. It can support students in gaining entry to the Level 3 workforce, to become a qualified early years practitioner.

How much we did

11

Students funding to do the Level 2 course.



How well we did it

27%

Went on to start their Level 3 qualified to become a qualified early years educator.

18%

Have paused their Level 2 for personal reasons and will continue in the coming year.

18%

Beginning the level 3 course in the coming year.

37%

Beginning the level 3 course in the coming year.

Is anyone better off?

"Having funding for places on the course has made a huge difference, many of these learners would not have been in a position to self-fund the course due to being unqualified staff. The course has given the learners the opportunity to progress in their learning and development and ultimately their careers, network with other like-minded practitioners and have the ability to progress on to become Level 3 Early Years Educators should they wish to" Highlands College Tutor

Child Care and Education Career Map

A group focusing on recruitment and retention within the early years workforce established the need to ensure that those who are looking to enter a workforce have a way of seeing the career progression opportunities, as well as the many different roles that are available in Jersey, across different qualification routes. A working group from the Best Start Partnership was established to develop this and see it into its creation.

How much we did



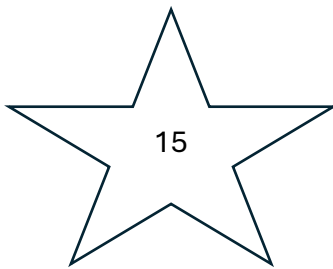
Careers fayres attended between mid-2023- end 2024

How well we did it

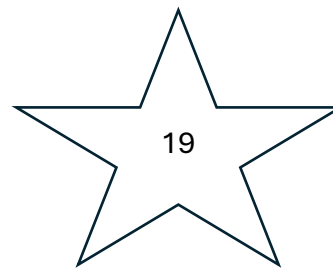


Career maps discussed and distributed.

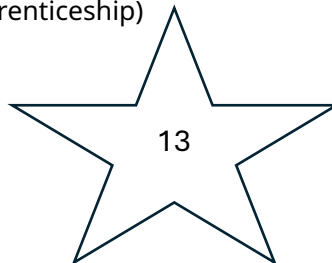
Is anyone better off?



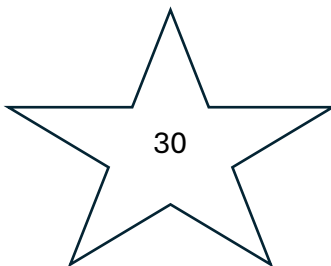
NCFE CACHE Level 2 Diploma for the Early Years Practitioner students enrolled in 2024 (Apprenticeship)



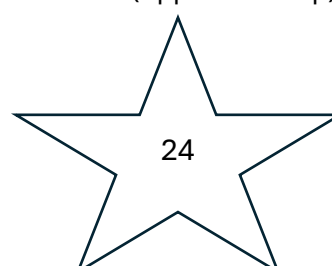
NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce students enrolled for years 2024-2026 (Apprenticeship)



NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education students enrolled for years 2023-2025 (Apprenticeship)



Level 3 Diploma in Childcare & Education - Year One.



Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education - Year Two.



Recruitment of dedicated staff to the Best Start Partnership

To fully realise the benefits of the funding, the Best Start Partnership recruited a dedicated administrator and manager.

This has enabled:

- Enhanced record keeping for the strategic group meetings and communication with partners.
- Social media and online presence.
- Connecting services and departments in codeveloped joint plans and actions.
- Momentum in agreed actions and tracking.
- Delivery and completion of pilot projects in partnership.
- Engagement with early years stakeholders and the local community.
- Data analysis and evaluative approaches.
- Production and presentation of reports to internal and external audiences.
- Collating and providing feedback to internal and external audiences from key stakeholders, parents and children.
- Production of family friend information, including online, which is needs-led.

Benefits to be realised moving forwards

A Fresh Approach to REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy)

Following feedback from the sector around pressures in releasing staff to undertake continuing professional development, we funded a shortened version of REAL training, suitable for those who had had previous REAL training and wanted a refresher, but also suitable for those who are new to REAL. This approach will be revisited and explored in 2025, to seek to increase update of the training, understand barriers and how we might overcome these.

Development of an Early Childhood Participation Toolkit and resources

The Best Start Partnership have created the Early Childhood Participation Toolkit⁸ to support anyone working with children aged 0-5 in listening to what babies and young children tell us. Listening to babies and young children is an important part of understanding what they are feeling and what they need. It is vital to provide environments in which all babies young children feel confident, safe and empowered, ensuring that they have the time and space to express themselves in whatever form suits them. This toolkit has been produced to provide guidance and support to anyone working directly with babies and young children aged 0-5, but can be used flexibly and with older children, depending on their stage of development. This will be further developed in 2025.

Communication and Language Pathway

A smaller working group, focusing on communication and language developed a Communication and Language Pathway, with the intention of highlighting the different services and support that is available to families, children and professionals from birth – 5, within a Best Start and Best Start Plus

⁸ <https://beststart.je/resources/early-years-participation-toolkit/>

offer. The Communication and Language Pathway will sit on the Best Start website, within a specific section linked to children's communication and language. This will be developed further in 2025.

Conclusions

The Covid-19 Recovery funding undoubtedly achieved its primary purposes, providing a timely and targeted focus on addressing service needs, identified by Best Start partners, resulting in a significant positive effect on the health, development and wellbeing of babies, young children and their families. It also enabled the Best Start Partnership to build the evidence and put it to use in supporting improvement in early years' experiences. Through better use of evidence, the Partnership is now in a strong position to show how investment has impact on outcomes and to save funds in the long term.